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# Tracing Peace Feelers

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DAILY JOURNALISM is so much the bits and pieces of any mosaic that newsmen often view themselves as instant historians. The constant necessity is to draw away from the daily input to assess what has been going on over a long period of time and to cast the sum in some perspective.

That can and increasingly is being done in many newspapers but it is easier to do it in a book. More space is available there and threads of history thus are more susceptible of explanation. A case in point is "The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam." It first appeared in rump serial newspaper form which, in Washington, was largely ignored because of the conjunction of the April rioting.

David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, both of the Los Angeles Times bureau here, have done a superb job of bringing together the publicly known facts, adding a great amount of new information and bridging many gaps with logical deductions in their story of the key attempts to bring the Vietnam War to the conference table and to find a route to peace.

The virtue of this book, to this reviewer who has long labored over much of the same ground, is that it is not polemical, as is so much that has been written about peace efforts. About as far as Kraslow and Loory let themselves go toward expressing a conclusion is to say that "the record suggests that the Johnson Administration missed opportunities over the years to secure, if not peace, at least negotiations; if not negotiations, at least talks; and if not talks, at least a propaganda advantage over the enemy that would have improved the nation's standing in the world community and the President's credibility at home."

This book is the American side of the story, to the degree that a reluctant Administration will let it be told or that dissatisfied Administration members will risk telling newsmen in private about what went on. A great deal has yet to be learned about the North Vietnamese side of the various incidents before any true judgment of history can be rendered.

It should be remembered, too, that the essence of "The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam" has to do with the mechanics, the

## Book Review

### 'The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam'

By David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory (Random House, 248 pp., \$5.95; Paper Vintage, \$1.95).

techniques, the channels in which the Johnson Administration has been involved. Behind this lies the critical problem of substance, which is touched upon more by inference than directly and which lies at the heart of today deadlock at the Paris Conference.

All this said, Kraslow and Loory deserve the highest marks for their ferreting efforts in many quarters of the globe. There are many instances when they write that so and so "probably" occurred or that such and such most likely took place. There are some in Washington, both Americans and Communists, who dispute this or that aspect of the book. But the overwhelming judgment this reviewer has heard is that the tone, tenor and vast amounts of detail are on the mark. From my own knowledge, this is the case.

The war can end only when one side or the other acknowledges defeat or there is a conjunction of interests in accepting a compromise. What this book shows is that in the earlier years, when the American-South Vietnamese side was in deep trouble, it refused to acknowledge defeat as Hanoi probably was demanding. The book also shows that the internal Johnson Administration organization of its peace efforts has been faulty, but faulty not by some dark design but because those in power were so long divided—indeed, remain so today—as to their objectives, with the President never clearly revealing his own feelings to those who had to conduct the negotiations.

Of all the many books on Vietnam, this is one of the rare ones that deserves a place on the bookshelf as a prime source for the ultimate volume, years hence, on what really happened and why.